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The strike on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad

"The most extensive and deplorable workingmen's strike which ever took place in this, or indeed in any other country began a week ago Monday among the freight hands of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at Martinsburg, West Virginia, the location of extensive repair-shops and terminus of one of the regular divisions of the road." So began the story of the Great Strike in the *Nation* of July 26, 1877.

Actually, "the most extensive . . . strike ever to take place in this or any other country," started at Camden Junction, two miles from Baltimore, a critical point through which all trains leaving Baltimore for Washington or the West passed. But it could have started anywhere along the 2,700-mile length of the B & O, extending from Baltimore, the home of the company's main offices, to Cumberland (Maryland), Wheeling, Martinsburg, and Keyser (West Virginia), and Newark (Ohio), then to St. Louis on its southwestern tip and Chicago on its northwestern tip. During the preceding three years, workers at these various points had suffered reductions of 50 percent of what they had earned before the panic; as a whole, they had sustained cuts averaging 30 percent more than the general average of reductions in railroad wages throughout the country. They were

the lowest-paid men on any railroad in the country, except for the workers on the New York Central line. B & O firemen had watched their wages drop from $55 per month in 1873 to $30 in 1877; brakemen from $70 to $30, and conductors from $90 to $50. All of them had been subjected to the usual abuses in their most aggravated forms—long hours, increased workloads, high prices at company hotels, poor working conditions, the petty tyranny of officious supervisors, and lack of employment for several days out of the week. Moreover, they had been forced to take a similar reduction just eight months before the latest 10 percent wage cut was announced. The July 11 announcement resulted in wages of ninety cents per day, and, as the firemen and brakemen pointed out, in order to merely survive at these wages, they would either have to "steal or starve."[1] The *Baltimore Sun* conceded that "the story of their struggles to live is very sad," adding: "Many of them declare they might as well starve without work as starve and work."[2]

The *Sun* had helped to light the fuse that was soon to burst into flame by publishing on July 15 the report of President Garrett on the earnings of the B & O. In it, Garrett took occasion to congratulate the board of directors upon the substantial nature of the business done in the previous twelve months. He went on to point out that the road's earnings showed the usual balance over and above expenses; in short, affairs were "entirely satisfactory." Before adjourning for the summer, the directors had voted the usual dividend of 10 percent to the stockholders.

Then, as if to rub salt into the workers' wounds, the following day the *Sun* published the news that the 10 percent reduction in wages had been ordered to take effect immediately, and that President Garrett was confident that everyone, both workers and townspeople all along the line, would "cheerfully recognize" that the reduction was a necessity.[3]

Shortly before noon on Monday, July 16—the day the B & O wage cut was to become effective—the fireman on Engine 32 deserted his train at Camden Junction. Other firemen soon joined him. While company agents quickly hired scabs, the strikers remained in the

area to persuade other firemen to leave their trains idle. The railroad immediately called for a large police contingent, and Mayor Ferdinand C. Latrobe, who, together with his family, had long been associated with the B & O, promptly responded and also ordered the arrest of the strike leaders at Camden Junction. Three strikers were arrested for "inciting a riot," a charge that even the police acknowledged was ridiculous by deferring their trial. Meanwhile, additional police were stationed along the route from Camden Station to Relay, the city limits.

When the police tried to operate outside the city limits, however, their authority was questioned by a Howard County judge. But the B & O was not to be put off by the courts in its efforts to crush the strike in its infancy. On the basis of authority conferred by laws of Maryland in 1860, the B & O president commissioned the police as special railway constables, and they returned to their posts outside the city limits.[4]

The railroad's first vice-president, John King, Jr., met with Governor John Lee Carroll, but the latter felt that no troops were needed at this point. The next day, July 17, 38 engineers joined with the striking firemen, and that evening 140 members of the Baltimore Boxmakers' and Sawyers' Union and 800 tin can makers, unable to secure their wage demands, also threw in their lot with the railroad workers. However, no attempts were made to halt the trains. Passenger trains went out unmolested, and fifteen freight trains moved out onto the line in three convoys.[5]

Martinsburg, West Virginia, which was six hours from Baltimore on the B & O, was an important relay station, where engines and crewmen changed off. Late Monday evening, July 16, Martinsburg became the second and more serious center of strike activity. The Trainmen's Union included practically all the railroad workers in Martinsburg, while the local citizens and the town paper were fully behind the railroad workers in any stand they might take against the latest wage cut.[6] The *Martinsburg Statesman* accused Garrett of "putting wages down to the starvation point," and urged the men "to resist."[7]

And resist they did! On July 16, more than a score of firemen assembled around the depot, seized and uncoupled engines, ran them into the roundhouse, and announced to road officials that no more trains would leave Martinsburg in either direction until the wage cut was rescinded. A.P. Schutt, the town mayor, who had close ties with the B & O (he owned the Berkeley House, Martinsburg's main hotel, which derived the major part of its business from the railroad), ordered the arrest of the strike leaders, but the pro-strike sympathies of the townspeople nullified his efforts. Schutt then tried to start the trains with new men, but again he was thwarted.[8]

By morning, the brakemen on the freight trains had joined the firemen, and although passenger trains were not interfered with, all freight was halted. The *Wheeling Intelligencer* announced on its front page: "At Martinsburg the strikers have absolute control and refuse to allow any freight trains to move." It added that "the strike is a serious affair. . . . These reductions in wages come with a special severity at a time like the present when the necessities of life have actually gone up in cost."[9]

Reports from Martinsburg gave no evidence of casualties or property damage, to say nothing of a "riot." Nevertheless, B & O Vice-President King telegraphed Governor Henry M. Mathews of West Virginia that a "riot" was in progress in Martinsburg which local authorities were "powerless to suppress." He requested that the governor call out the militia to protect B & O property and enable the company to get its trains running on schedule.

Without making any further inquiry, Mathews ordered into action the Beverly Light Guards, a company of volunteer militiamen from the Martinsburg area, the majority of whom were railroad workers. He instructed Colonel C.J. Faulkner, the officer in charge, to "prevent any interference by rioters with the men at work, and prevent the obstruction of trains."[10]

A scab engineer, with militia protection, started to run a freight train through the yards. When twenty-eight-year-old William P. Vandergriff, one of the strikers, attempted to cut the train off and, in the process, exchanged fire with a militiaman, he was shot by several of

the soldiers at point-blank range. Three balls entered his body, one breaking his left arm. Later that day, Vandergriff's arm was amputated, and after nine days of agony he died, leaving behind a pregnant wife "without pecuniary means." The *Martinsburg Statesman* called Vandergriff "a victim to Gov. Mathews' Order," and commented bitterly: "We believe he died a martyr to what he believed to be a compulsory duty. He was shot down in sight of the lowly home whose inmates he was trying to shield from starvation."[11]

Meanwhile, at the first wounding of a striker, the would-be strikebreaker deserted the engine, and no one could be found to take his place. "It is impossible for me to do anything further with my company," Colonel Faulkner wired Mathews. "Most of them are railroad men and they will not respond. The force is too formidable for me to cope with."[12] He thereupon dismissed his men until further notice.

President Garrett and other B & O officials pressured Governor Mathews to call upon the president of the United States for federal troops. "The loss of an hour," Garrett wired, "would most seriously affect us and imperil vast interests." But Mathews balked at seeking federal assistance until he had exhausted "all means within the State to suppress the riot." The governor then sent a company of sixty-five militiamen from Moorefield—"none of them railroad men"—to Martinsburg. "I send arms and ammunition with them," he announced, "and the force will be increased as they go on. If that force is not sufficient, I will then use other means—the riot shall be stopped."[13]

The fact that there was still no evidence of a "riot" did not seem to matter to Governor Mathews. Certainly there had been no violence, no damage to or even tampering with company property, and no injuries since the first and only shooting in Martinsburg. It is significant that while the governor was unwilling to go along with the B & O officials in requesting federal troops, Vice-President King telegraphed the Washington agent of the B & O that the governor might soon change his mind, and suggested that the secretary of war be informed of the situation so that he might be ready to re-

spond promptly with the necessary forces.[14]

While the company and the governor had been trying unsuccessfully to crush the strike at Martinsburg, it had spread to other points along the line in West Virginia: Keyser, Piedmont, Grafton, and Wheeling. At Keyser, white and Black railroad workers met and voted to join the strike. They had "soberly considered the step," and finally decided that "at the present state of wages which the company had imposed upon us, we cannot live and provide our wives and children with the necessities of life."[15]

A reporter for the *Wheeling Intelligencer* described the strikers at various railroad points in the state as "a respectable body of men . . . [who] in their towns receive every encouragement."[16] A resident of Keyser agreed and assured the Wheeling paper that nearly everyone in the communities affected believed that "the whole thing grows out of too much pay and speculation among the head men—big salaries, wine suppers, free passes and presents to Congressmen for their votes," while the men whose labor made all this possible lived on the very edge of starvation.[17] The *Baltimore Sun* reprinted the letter and cited it as evidence of the fact that the railroaders had the support of their fellow-townspeople:

> There is no disguising the fact that the strikers in all their lawful acts have the fullest sympathy of the community. The 10 per cent reduction after two previous reductions was ill-advised. The company for years has boasted of its great earnings and paid enormous dividends. One must therefore ask if wages that do not now permit over $5 per week to go to the housing, clothing, and feeding of a family are more than sufficient as a remuneration for experienced labor, full of danger and responsibility?

The *Sun* concluded with an observation that was to appear frequently in other communities as the Great Strike developed:

> The singular part of the disturbance is the very active part taken by the women, who are the wives or mothers of the fire-

> men. They looked famished and wild, and declare for starvation rather than have their people work for the reduced wages. Better to starve outright, they say, than to die by slow starvation.[18]

At Martinsburg, meanwhile, the situation was at a standstill. The B & O officials offered no compromise to the strikers. The state militia remained on alert, but did nothing to "further exasperate the strikers." The latter were resorting to "moral suasion" to win over the members of the militia and the railroad shopmen in the machine and engine shops, who were still on the job. In the latter case they were successful, but not with the militia. A half dozen or more of the strike leaders called on Captain Miller in his quarters and asked what he planned to do. "They referred to the almost starving condition of men whose wages were now proposed to be further cut down; that flour was ten dollars a barrel, etc." Miller replied brusquely that he "had nothing to do with the price of flour," that he had come to Martinsburg to see that the trains passed unmolested, and that he was determined to carry out orders "if his entire company was used up in the attempt.[19]

Despite Miller's bluster, it was clear that the Martinsburg railroad men, aided by their fellow-townspeople, had effected a thoroughly successful strike. They had completely stopped the movement of freight trains through the town even when the trains were offered military protection. But the situation was still nothing resembling a riot, and a far, far cry from an insurrection. No property had been damaged, nor had any blood been shed since the first day of the strike.

However, this state of affairs hardly suited Colonel Robert M. Delaplain, the governor's aide and deputy in command of the militia. He dashed off a telegram to Governor Mathews in which he noted the intensity of the pro-strike sentiment in Martinsburg, declaring that no one could be found willing to run a locomotive, even with militia protection, and that "the odds" were "largely against our small force." The wire contained no information of new violence or disorder. Nevertheless, it ended: "Captain Faulkner thinks that two hundred U.S. Marines could not be

in excess of the requirement. . . ."[20]

This time, Mathews did not hesitate to respond favorably to the suggestion that he call in federal troops. He did so without having first put Martinsburg in a state of emergency or under martial law, without calling up additional volunteers to supplement the existing militia, and without calling the legislature into special session to deal with the emergency—in short, without making any further use of powers at his command. Indeed, Mathews later conceded in a report to the legislature that before federal troops were requested, "one militiaman had been wounded, one striker killed, and a total of $8,823.41 expended on the attempt to break the strike."[21]

On July 18, Mathews telegraphed President Hayes:

> Owing to unlawful combinations and domestic violence now existing at Martinsburg, and at other points along the line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, it is impossible with any force at my command to execute the laws of the State.
>
> I therefore call upon your Excellency for the assistance of the United States military to protect the law abiding people of the State against domestic violence and to maintain the supremacy of the law.
>
> The Legislature is not now in session and could not be assembled in time to take any action in the emergency. A force of from two to three hundred should be sent without delay to Martinsburg where my aide Col. Delaplain will meet and confer with the officer in command.[22]

A reporter for the *New York World* wrote his paper from Martinsburg:

> It has been well observed that if the rights of the strikers had been infringed or violated instead of that of the Railroad corporations, it is probable that Governor Mathews would have hesitated a long while before he would have thought it his duty to call on the president.[23]

Needless to say, the president of the B & O took a different view. Upon learning that federal troops had been requested, he wired congratulations to Mathews. He then sent President Hayes a long wire urging "that the application . . . be immediately granted." Garrett cited the impossibility of moving freights and the open intimidation of and attacks upon "loyal employees." The state had done all it could "to suppress the insurrection," he wrote, and traffic on the B & O—"this great national highway"—could be "restored for public use" only by bringing in federal troops. Unless this action was taken immediately, "the greatest consequences" were inevitable for both the B & O and "all the other lines in the country which like ourselves have been obliged to introduce measures of economy in these trying times for the preservation of the effectiveness of railroad property."

The B & O president even suggested how the federal forces could be used most effectively to break the strike. He recommended that soldiers be transported from Fort McHenry in Baltimore and from Washington, since these were "points near to the scenes of the disturbance . . . from which movements can be made with the greatest promptness and rapidity."[24]

The Great Strike of 1877 was the first instance in which the regular army entered into a labor disturbance on a national scale. Prior to that time, the army had had some experience with labor troubles. In 1834, Andrew Jackson ordered regulars into Maryland to end a strike of Irish workers on the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, and during the Civil War, department commanders used troops to end strikes, including the one by engineers on the Reading Railroad and those by workers in St. Louis, Louisville, Cold Springs (N.Y.), and in the turbulent Pennsylvania coal fields.[25] However, the decision as to whether or not federal troops should be dispatched rested entirely with the president. Statute law empowered him to respond to state requests for assistance in suppressing "domestic violence," but did not compel him to grant such requests. In each instance, the president was obliged to weigh the merits of the application. In his inaugural address, President Hayes had spoken out strongly "against

interfering in the domestic affairs of states," and while he was referring to Reconstruction in the Southern states, it was not difficult for many in the labor movement to expect that he would apply this principle to a situation such as that in West Virginia.[26]

However, as we have seen, Hayes owed his accession to the presidency, in large part, to Tom Scott and his associates, and he had surrounded himself with cabinet members who were closely linked to corporations in general and to the railroads in particular. Secretary of State William M. Evarts was a leading New York corporation and railroad lawyer who "usually ranged on the side of capital rather than labor," who had defended the railroads in key cases involving rate regulation, and who, as lawyer for the manufacturers in the famous Jacobs case, helped to invalidate a New York law outlawing the manufacture of cigars in tenement houses. Other cabinet members who had close railroad associations were Attorney General Charles Devens, Secretary of the Navy Richard W. Thompson, and Secretary of War George W. McCrary. Gerald G. Eggert observes that McCrary "appears to have owed his cabinet appointment to the influence of such railroad leaders as General Grenville M. Dodge, Tom Scott, and Jay Gould."[27]

On July 17, the press carried the news that Attorney General Devens and Secretary of State Evarts had left Washington on a visit to the mining regions of eastern Pennsylvania. Omitted from the dispatch, however, was the fact that the cabinet members were the guests of the railroads and were to make the tour in the private car of Pennsylvania Railroad President Tom Scott.[28]

Hayes himself had previously responded favorably to a request for troops to break a strike. In 1876, as governor of Ohio, he had sent state militia to Massillon to break a coal miners' strike. Responding to a letter of congratulations from Congressman James A. Garfield, Hayes wrote: "We shall crush out the lawbreakers if the courts and juries do not fail." He did succeed in crushing the strike, thereby earning the gratitude of both the Ohio coal operator and of political boss Marcus A. Hanna, who, on the occasion of Hayes's nomination to the presidency, wrote that the man who "took the

position as did our Gov.[ernor] during our recent mining troubles at Massillon and by such action maintained the supremacy of the law giving us again control of our property," deserved to be the next president of the United States. Republicans hailed Hayes as the "law and order" candidate.[29]

As Hayes received Governor Mathews's request for federal troops, he must have pondered the fact that the army had been reduced to a peacetime total of 25,000 men, and that all but a skeleton force were stationed beyond the Mississippi River, guarding the Mexican border or fighting the Indians. But Mathews had requested only two to three hundred men. More serious, however, was the fact that army enlisted men, whose wages were already in arrears, were receiving no pay because Congress had adjourned without voting an army appropriations bill for the fiscal year that began July 1. Could such soldiers be relied on to act against workers whose chief complaint was that their wages had been cut to the starvation level?[30]

After consultation with the chief executive, Secretary of War McCrary telegraphed Mathews that the president was "averse to intervention unless it is clearly shown that the state is unable to suppress insurrection," and asked for details as to the size of the militia and the number of "insurgents." Neither Hayes nor his secretary of war seemed to doubt that it was an "insurrection," even though no source other than Mathews and Garrett had referred to the strike in those terms.

Mathews replied that he had "no doubt" that within ten days he could organize a force of West Virginians of sufficient size "to suppress any riot," but he feared in the meantime the destruction of "much property," and the loss of "valuable lives."

Hayes's reaction now was swift. Without seeking further information, he issued a proclamation at four o'clock in the afternoon of July 18, ordering all "lawless elements" in West Virginia to desist and disperse before noon on Thursday, July 19. He also instructed General William H. French to proceed to Martinsburg with the Second United States Artillery to enforce his proclamation. Following along the lines of Garrett's suggestion, the adjutant general wired

the commanding officers of the Washington Arsenal and Fort McHenry in Baltimore to send every available man to Martinsburg as soon as possible. A special train to transport the troops was provided by the Baltimore & Ohio, which later presented a bill to the federal government.[31]

"Coming into Martinsburg with the United States troops, the SUN representative was surprised at the quietness of the town," wrote the correspondent for the New York paper. The train had been stopped at Harper's Ferry to wait for daylight, out of fear that the tracks had been tampered with by the strikers. But in the morning, nothing was found to be wrong, and the train continued to the outskirts of Martinsburg. Scouts were sent ahead and reported that "everything was as quiet as a Sunday." Fifteen hundred freight cars and one hundred engines were lined up on the tracks and were being watched by hundreds of strikers. A hundred or more striking canal boatmen were also in the crowd, encouraging the railroad men in the hope that they might win better terms from the canal companies if the strikers won. There was no sign of drunkenness anywhere.

Late that morning, the sheriff's deputies and the town police passed out copies of President Hayes's proclamation commanding "all persons engaged in said unlawful insurrectionary proceedings to disperse and retire to their respective abodes on or before twelve o'clock noon on the 19th day of July instant. . . ." But when twelve o'clock came, there was no "riotous crowd" to be dispersed, and the proclamation aroused little interest.[32]

That afternoon, a coal train was readied to leave for Baltimore under the protection of the state militia and federal troops. The engineer and fireman were on hand to take out the first train to leave Martinsburg since the strike started, when an incident occurred that was widely reported. Here is how one reporter described it:

> The wife and daughter of Engineer Bedford climbed to the foot board, and pleaded, tears in their eyes, that he would not go. . . . The women were heroines immediately, and were applauded by other wives and children who had gathered around

the engine. Bedford turned to the officials, saying that he could not go.[33]

Later that afternoon, a replacement for Bedford was found, and a train consisting of twenty coal cars was started, with six soldiers on the engine and a dozen in the last car. A guard of three armed men walked at double-quick in front of the engine. At the East Street crossing, half a dozen men and two women were standing by the side of the track with clubs in their hands. The soldiers loaded their guns and the men and women got out of the way. It took the train ten hours to make the trip to Baltimore!

A westward bound freight train left soon after with twenty regulars ahead of the engine and still more troops stationed throughout the train. When the train reached the west end of the town, one hundred armed strikers tried to stop it. The fireman thereupon seized his meal bucket and quit. Several B & O officials pleaded with him to return, offering him premium pay. While they were arguing, his wife, mother, and two brothers pushed by the armed guards and took him away with them. The crowd set up a cheer. At this point, the sheriff, assisted by the entire militia, rushed to the scene, seized Dick Zepp, the twenty-year-old engineer who was said to be the leader of the Martinsburg strike, and arrested him. As he was being taken away, his brother George, a B & O fireman who was not in sympathy with the strike, came running down the track with a big navy revolver in his hand. His mother was following him and pleading with him not to go on the engine. But George Zepp shouted, "I'm going if it costs my life," joined the engineer in the cab, and the train moved out.[34]

This was the last train to leave that day. "The firemen are not discouraged," wrote the *New York Sun* reporter as the day ended. But warrants had been issued for the arrest of ten strikers, charging them with "exciting a riot," and more discouraging was the news that evening that "a large number of engineers and firemen from the Baltimore division" would be in Martinsburg by morning, ready to take out the strikebound freight trains.[35] On the morning of July

20, the strikebreakers from Baltimore arrived and moved out the freight trains without interference. By evening, the clogged yard had been largely cleared. "The riot here may be regarded as suppressed," Delaplain wired Mathews gleefully. B & O officials summoned reporters to the company's headquarters and gave them the news that "the backbone of the strike has been broken."[36]

But elsewhere along the B & O line, the strike was anything but broken. "I might as well die by the bullet as to starve to death by inches," strikers told reporters at different points on the B & O line. At Keyser, they met and unanimously determined to stand firm until the end, and concluded:

> Resolved, that we, the men of the Third Division, have soberly and calmly considered the step we have taken, and declare that at the present state of wages which the company have imposed upon us, we cannot live and provide our wives and children with the necessaries of life, and that we only ask for wages that will enable us to provide such necessaries.[37]

On Friday, July 20, the same day that the strike at Martinsburg was reported broken, a manifesto was posted at Westernport, Maryland, and copies put up at stations along the B & O line. The eloquent and fiery document, described as "the first manifesto issued by the railway strikers," read:

> WE SHALL CONQUER OR WE SHALL DIE
>
> Strike and live! Bread we must have! Remain and perish! Be it understood, if the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company does not meet the demands of the employees at an early date, the officials will hazard their lives and endanger their property, for we shall run their trains and locomotives into the river; we shall blow up their bridges; we shall tear up their railroads; we shall consume their shops with fire and ravage their hotels with desperation. A company that has from time to time so unmercifully cut our wages and finally has reduced us to starvation, for such

> we have, has lost all sympathy. We have humbled ourselves from time to time to unjust demands until our children cry for bread. A company that knows all this, we should ask in the name of high heaven what more do they want—our blood? They can get our lives. We are willing to sacrifice them, not for the company, but for our rights. Call out your armed hosts if you want them. Shield yourselves if you can, and remember that no foe, however dreaded, can repel us for a moment. Our determination may seem frail, but let it come. They may think our cause is weak. Fifteen thousand noble miners, who have been insulted and put upon by this self same company, are at our backs. The merchants and community at large along the whole line of the road are on our side, and the working classes of every State in the Union are in our favor, and we feel confident that the God of the poor and the oppressed of the earth is with us. Therefore let the clashing of arms be heard; let the fiery elements be poured out if they think it right, but in heed of our right and in defence of our families, we shall conquer or we shall die.[38]

On the same day that the manifesto was posted, at Cumberland, Maryland, disgruntled miners, Chesapeake & Ohio canal men, railroad strikers, and unemployed workers uncoupled cars from a westbound freight train. Railroad officials managed to get the cars coupled again, and the train moved on. At Keyser, West Virginia, it was run onto a side track, and the crew was taken off by force. At three o'clock that afternoon, B & O officials met with Governor John Carroll of Maryland. President Garrett demanded that the Maryland National Guard be called out, and by 3:30 p.m. the governor had ordered Brigadier General James R. Herbert to prepare Baltimore's Fiftieth and Sixth militia regiments to go to Cumberland. As Edward Hungerford, historian of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, explains: ". . . The word of the President of the B & O was law to Governors, [and] all state officials."[39]

On July 18, the *Baltimore Sun* had proudly commented that, in contrast to the "serious disturbance . . . in West Virginia," the strik-

ers in Baltimore "maintained perfect order." Two days later, it was still congratulating the city on the fact that "the striking firemen remained quiet." Other Baltimore papers extended similar congratulations and expressed the hope that conditions in Baltimore would continue at the same level.[40]

But, like the Baltimore press, Governor Carroll had underestimated the sympathies of the Baltimore working class community for the strikers. "The working people everywhere are with us," a leader of the railroad strikers told a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer,* and he went on:

> They know what it is to bring up a family on ninety cents a day, to live on beans and corn meal week in and week out, to run in debt at the stores until you cannot get trusted any longer, to see the wife breaking down under privation and distress, and the children growing sharp and fierce like wolves day after day because they don't get enough to eat.[41]

The depression had brought misery to Baltimore's workers, just as it had to those in other cities. It had reduced the number of local trade unions from fifteen to four, and produced a larger number of unemployed. Mayor Latrobe had shown no interest in dealing with the unemployment problem and had initiated public works programs only after the Democratic Club reminded him of the "degradation of the working man and his family." There were other signs of general discontent at the time the railroad workers went on strike. Seven hundred canmakers struck for more pay, and there was a flurry of small strikes started by the factory workers immediately thereafter.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, moreover, was a very unpopular institution. Garrett, who had been its president since 1858, was generally disliked. People resented his power, hated the way in which he treated his workers, disliked his subordinate officials even more than him, and, in the words of the *Baltimore News,* were "simply tired of hearing nothing but 'The B. and O. said this, and the B. and

O. said that.'" Among the city's workers, it was commonly felt that the B & O could well afford to reduce dividends instead of wages, and treat its workers at least civilly. This feeling was intensified on Friday morning, July 20—the very day the militiamen were to be called into service on the company's request—when the newspapers carried the notice inserted by Vice-President King that the company was abandoning its policy of "half a loaf of bread is better than none at all," that all strikers should consider themselves dismissed, and that in the eyes of the company, therefore, they were "trespassers."[42]

What happened that Friday night, therefore, was the product of years of accumulated resentment in Baltimore's working class circles.

There were two methods available for calling out the militia: to summon the soldiers by messengers or by sounding the militia call from the firehouse and the City Hall. Governor Carroll was opposed to ringing the City Hall bell—"Big Sam"—and the smaller fire bells; he feared the emergency call would arouse the populace. But General Herbert argued that time was of the essence, and in the end he prevailed. At about 6 p.m. on Friday, June 20, for the first time in Baltimore's history, "Big Sam" on the City Hall and the fire bells all rang the militia call: 1—5—1. At the same time, trains were prepared in Camden Station to rush the militia to Cumberland.

But the regiments never got to Cumberland. The bells pealed out just as most of Baltimore's men and boys were leaving work. (As in other cities, it was common in Baltimore for a child of nine or ten to put in a fourteen-hour day in a shop or mill.) Crowds of the angry and curious swarmed to the armories. At Camden Station, before the emergency military call, only a handful of people were congregated; after the call, thousands had assembled in less than half an hour.

Fayette and Front Streets, in front of the Sixth Regiment Armory, had been torn up for the laying of gaspipes while buildings in the area were in the process of being erected. Rocks and cobblestones—or, as the *Baltimore Sun* put it, "the material of warfare"—were in

piles a few feet apart. As soon as darkness fell, a crowd of youths, men, and some women began throwing stones at the sentries in the street and at the guard in the vestibule, who retreated to the drill room in the rear of the armory. When the anger of the crowd seemed to subside, the order was given to the 120 men who had answered the roll call to march to the trains in two groups. A band and fife corps was supposed to have led the march, but it was decided to dispense with this display. Twenty rounds of ammunition were distributed to each of the men, who carried breech-loading rifles.

As the militiamen set out, they were greeted by a shower of stones and "cries and cheers for the strikers." Driven back into the armory, the soldiers again attempted to march, this time supported by a squad of police, but again they were driven back into the armory. The third time, the militiamen came out of the door firing into the crowd. An on-the-spot reporter wrote: "The streets were quickly deserted and the detachment passed by The Sun office, still firing random shots over their shoulders with apparent recklessness." Bullets shivered the glass in windows along the streets of Baltimore as the militia passed by. Dead and wounded were carried into nearby saloons and drug stores, whose floors quickly "looked like a butcher's pen."

Of the 120 soldiers who had left the armory, only 59 remained when all three companies reached the Camden depot. (The others went home.) By that time, the "second Battle of Bunker Hill," as it was called, was over. Eleven lay dead and about forty were wounded. (The number of wounded remained undetermined because many were quickly carried off by relatives or friends.) All were civilians. A number of the dead were bystanders shot while trying to shield themselves from the fire of the military. One was fourteen-year-old Willie Hourand, whom the *Baltimore News* described as "one of the brightest" of its newsboys. He was the sole support of an invalid mother.

At Camden Station, trains were waiting, engines fully steamed, scabs at their posts, ready to go. While the soldiers were loading, an

enraged crowd of about fifteen thousand circled to the rear of the station and attacked the telegraph office on Lee Street. The occupants fled, and the crowd wrecked the building. They then crossed the tracks to the train shed and stoned the engine, which was just about ready to pull out with the soldiers. The crew quickly deserted their posts, and the strikers tore up some of the tracks, making it impossible for the militiamen to leave. Actually, President Garrett and Governor Carroll had decided that the militia was more urgently needed in Baltimore than in Cumberland. The orders were revoked, and the militiamen—that is, those who had not departed—remained in the train sheds at Camden Station.

Outside, the crowd had applied torches to several wooden passenger coaches, and the flames were reaching to the sky. Firemen who responded to calls were stoned, and some hoses were cut. But with difficulty, and with the aid of the police, they succeeded in extinguishing the flames.[43]

Inside Camden Station, B & O officials goaded Governor Carroll into calling on President Hayes for help. "The rioters," he wired frantically, "have taken possession of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad depot, set fire to same, and driven off all firemen who attempted to extinguish the flames." Hayes responded immediately. Shortly after 11:30, he ordered General William Barry, commander of Fort McHenry in Baltimore, to gather all the men he could find and proceed to the Camden depot at once. Then for good measure, he ordered down three companies of regulars from New York Harbor and told General Winfield S. Hancock, commander of the Military Division of the Atlantic, to supervise operations.

Meanwhile, both the crowd and the flames had cooled down. The rioters started drifting home after the fire was finally put out. At around midnight, Carroll wired Hayes that the troops would not be necessary; but the president sent them anyway.[44]

On Saturday, July 21, quiet reigned in Baltimore. "The striking firemen, engineers and other train hands were, as usual, standing quietly in small groups along the lower portions of Light Street." Their committees were waiting, they told a reporter for the *Sun*,

> . . . to hear any proposal from the company, and are ready and anxious to work for fair wages. . . . They say that they had nothing whatever to do with the riotous proceedings Friday night, and have never used violence to person or property of any kind, but have only endeavored to prevent the running of trains by the company. They deprecate all riotous proceedings, and it is not believed they were instrumental in, counseled or provoked the unexpected outbreak which characterized Friday night.[45]

By early Sunday morning, July 22, only a few knots of curious people were outside the Camden depot, and Governor Carroll announced that the riot was over. But Baltimore was now a "military garrison" with between 1,200 and 2,000 federal soldiers in or near the city, while local forces had been swelled by citizen recruits. Seven hundred soldiers guarded the B & O property at Camden Station with two Gatling guns and several field pieces, while other troops were being kept busy opening the line. The Baltimore police were engaged in rounding up men suspected of having been involved in the events of July 20—none of whom were strikers.[46]

Most newspapers in Baltimore and nearby cities confirmed the *Sun*'s report that the strikers had not been involved in the June 20 riots, but this gained the strikers nothing but some editorial praise.[47] The B & O officials blamed them for being indirectly responsible, and showed not the slightest willingness to compromise. Vice-President King reiterated his statement that the strikers could consider themselves dismissed and that the company regarded them as "trespassers."[48]

The difficulties of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, however, were not yet over. Freight traffic along the main line was still paralyzed, and the company was still losing "thousands of dollars . . . every hour."[49] The strikers stuck doggedly to their task of trying to get back their 10 percent and obtain several improvements as well. On July 26, committees representing the engineers, firemen, brakemen, and conductors met and drew up a set of resolutions which were unanimously adopted by the strikers. They called for the establishment of two classes of enginemen, at a daily wage of $3.50 for first

class and $3.00 for second class; for a minimum wage of $2.50 per day for firemen and brakemen; that when engines arrived at their destination, men be available to take sand and to clean, fire, and house them; that a quarter-day's pay be given each railroad worker called to duty and not furnished work, or laid over; that there be an allowance of an additional half-day's pay for Sunday operation; that half a day be allowed every worker for fetching and returning engines; that the time for the run from Martinsburg to Cumberland and return be two days; and finally

> That no man shall be discharged for any act done or participation had in the late strikes, and that all men who have drawn their time shall be immediately reinstated in their positions.

The resolutions were presented to the B & O as "suggestions for an amicable adjustment," and a four-man committee representing the engineers, freight firemen, freight conductors, and brakemen also presented them to Governor Carroll with a request for his endorsement. In introducing the resolutions to the governor, engineer J.H. Elder, committee chairman, stressed that the strike had only one objective: "to obtain wages which would enable them to live," and that in seeking this goal, the strikers had not engaged in violence "and would not counsel such a thing." After listening to a reading of the resolutions, the governor stated that he had no power to remedy their "troubles," and advised them to devote themselves to persuading "a number of sympathizers who are lawless men . . . to desist from all violence." They could be sure, he added, that whether or not they succeeded in this endeavor, he intended to see that the laws were enforced and violence stamped out "at any cost." Once again, the committee disclaimed any connection with rioters or the destruction of property, and emphasized that the strikers "had simply demanded living rates for work, and had abstained from labor until those rates were allowed." But Governor Carroll was not satisfied. It was not enough, he said, for the strikers to abstain "from riotous proceedings":

> You are responsible for the violence that has been done, whether you were actually engaged in it or not. You on your part must drive away from you the evil-disposed people who have done so much harm, and discountenance in the plainest way everything tending to violence.

The governor then made it clear that he was not merely talking of the destruction of railroad property, but the very strike itself, for "interference with men who work is equally a violation of law with rioting."[50]

Thus, all the committee obtained from the governor was a lecture on violence. He had not a word to say about the murder of eleven Baltimore citizens by the militiamen.

The following day, the strikers heard an even longer lecture by William Keyser, second vice-president of the B & O. Keyser addressed the strikers at their meeting in Cross Street Institute, where they gathered to hear the company's reply to their proposal for an "amicable settlement." The reply, in the form of a letter to the strikers' committee signed by John King, Jr., and William Keyser (the first and second vice-presidents), was couched in temperate language. The B & O stood fast by the 10 percent reduction in wages, describing it as having been "forced upon the company by the exigencies of the times, the great depression in business, and the severe competition of rival lines, and it cannot be changed." But the company agreed to arrange matters so that all of its employees would be able "to obtain a full average month's work, so that . . . you can earn more wages than you now receive." Again, the company was willing to remedy the situation which subjected its trainmen to great inconvenience and expense because they were kept from their homes when trains were delayed on the road, by providing them with passes "which will enable the men to come to their homes and return to their trains, under proper restrictions." This far the company was prepared to go, and no further; it expressed the hope that the strikers' committee and the strikers themselves "will see the wisdom and justice of accepting promptly the company's terms, and thus

the strike will end and work will be resumed."

Keyser's tone in speaking to the strikers after the reading of the company's letter was one of arrogance and contempt, in contrast with that of the written document. While the letter had indicated a desire that the men return to work, and said nothing about reprisals, Keyser denounced the strikers, saying they had been "the cause of this great disturbance, and will be rigidly held accountable for it." The strikers, he declared, had stopped work, prevented others from working, and injured the company by whom they were employed and the community and country in which they lived—all because of the order calling for a 10 percent cut in pay. However, Keyser went on, the president of the road had also had his pay cut 10 percent—since the order applied to all whose pay exceeded one dollar a day—but he had not seen fit to act lawlessly and encourage others to do so. He had accepted the pay cut:

> You, however, a minority of less than ten per cent of the employees, have seen fit to assume the attitude that you will neither accept the reduction or allow others to fill your places.
>
> The position is wholly untenable, and one which for a moment could not be conceded. If it were, all discipline, all law, and all order would be sapped at their foundations, and the principle would be established that a small minority of men, discontented with their real or imaginary grievances, could assume the position that the great mass of their colleagues should be forced into compulsory idleness on their account.

It is not necessary to comment on the ridiculous comparison between President Garrett's pay and that of the strikers, but Keyser failed to clarify just how the demand to rescind the 10 percent pay would destroy "all discipline, all law, and all order," when the company was able to grant two of the other strikers' demands—a full month's work and the right to use passes—without such dire effects. Instead, Keyser devoted the remainder of his lecture to a tirade in which he held the B & O strikers responsible for having convulsed

the country and forced the state militias and federal troops into action, thereby compelling men to leave their "homes and their families, and from peaceful pursuits to shoulder their arms in order to protect the property of this company and the city from the lawlessness your acts have engendered; worse than all this, you have aroused a spirit which, unless curbed and quelled, strikes at the very fundamental root of the liberty and life of this country." He continued with the timeworn argument used by employers from the days of the first labor strikers:

> The company asks no man to work if he is dissatisfied with his pay, and I say to you that if you can do better elsewhere or in any other vocation, it is an injustice to yourselves and to your families to remain longer in the service. . . .

However, should they think they could stay and force the company to rescind the 10 percent wage cut, they would quickly find that they were beating their heads against a stone wall. And if they tried to achieve this goal by preventing the movement of the B & O's trains, they would face the most serious consequences: "You may rest assured that the entire power of the State and the general government will be exerted to maintain law and order."[51]

It is a tribute to the strikers' courage and militancy that, even in Keyser's presence, not one striker advocated accepting the company's proposition and all insisted that the men stand by their demands. A vote was taken and the company's proposal was unanimously rejected. Keyser then withdrew from the meeting, but upon leaving the hall he told reporters that what had just happened was of no importance. He had just returned from a visit to areas on the line in West Virginia and western Maryland, and the company, with the aid of the state militia and federal troops, was beginning to run both freight and passenger trains. The men could vote to stay out if they wished, but normal service would soon be restored since "the company has all the men it wants."[52]

Keyser's statement was basically true. Bonuses of fifty dollars had

been offered to men willing to run the trains, while any striker approaching men on the trains was immediately arrested. To be sure, crowds of strikers and sympathizers along the B & O line fought bitterly, but they were helpless against soldiers who did not hesitate to fire into crowds.

General William Getty, who took over command of the Second U.S. Artillery from General French,[53] carried through the process of crushing the strike. Starting at Cumberland, he deployed detachments of his men in every city along the main line, broke through the blockades, and forced strikers to surrender possession of the company's property. It required three days of fighting to open the road between Keyser and Grafton. By August 1, after sixteen days on strike, the strikers began drifting back to work all along the line. The strike on the Baltimore & Ohio was over, and the press carried King's announcement that the main line was open for traffic.[54]

Days before this, however, the strike on the B & O had been relegated to the inside pages of the nation's newspapers by the startling events taking place in other cities. It was these events that Keyser had in mind when he told the Baltimore strikers that they were responsible for having "aroused a spirit" that "strikes at the very life of this country." He had spelled it out:

> You have seen the results of the terrible riots at Pittsburgh and the enormous destruction of property, to be paid for by the already overburdened taxpayers; you have seen innocent men and women shot down in our own streets; you have seen riot and bloodshed in Chicago and Cincinnati, Reading and other prominent cities of the land. Is not this sufficient to cause you to pause and reflect before you go still further in this reckless career?[55]

The *Martinsburg Statesman* conceded that Keyser's description of what was taking place in the fourth week in July was fairly accurate. But it differed with the B & O vice-president as to who was

responsible. In its opinion, the strike that had started on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and "become general throughout the country," with such bloody repercussions, should teach "heartless and selfish railway corporations that there is a point in oppression beyond which it is not safe to go."[56]